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# THE HAND OF THE DEAD IN JAPAN

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*Professor Clement is recognized as one of the few American authorities on Modern Japan. As a missionary teacher and now a member of one of the state institutions of college grade, he has had abundant opportunity to study the great nation of which he writes so sympathetically. His present article explains one of those Japanese traits which the Western world has never fully understood.*

The tragic suicide of General Count Nogi and the Countess, on the eve of the funeral of their late emperor, now appropriately known as Meiji Tenno, was a great shock to the Western world. The feeling was, no doubt, largely due to misunderstanding of the moral purpose of the dreadful deed and of the motive which lay behind the whole social, political, moral, and religious world of Old Japan and has not yet lost its potency under the influence of occidental and Christian precepts. The Christian idea of the value of human life condemns such a deed as a terrible sin against self, mankind, and God, the giver of life. The oriental idea is that, under such circumstances, the spirit of the dead has even greater influence than the living man or woman. "It is because of this faith that the Japanese soldier in battle never surrenders in the face of apparent defeat, but freely offers himself in the name of his emperor, that, as a god, he may not only be the victorious avenger of his country, but the object of his people's unceasing worship and veneration." This illustrates what Hearn, in one of the chapters of his best work, *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation*, has called "the rule of the dead over the

living." And he added that "the hand of the dead was heavy; it is heavy upon the living even today."

Moreover, only a few days before that tragic event occurred, there was issued from the press the second and revised edition of a book which is more or less of a commentary on the foregoing principle. This book is entitled, *Ancestor-Worship and Japanese Law*, and has been written in English by Dr. N. Hozumi, for twenty-five years an active, now an honorary, professor of law in the Imperial University, Tokyo. He is also a barrister-at-law of the Middle Temple, England; and he was one of the compilers of the new Japanese Civil Code. A perusal of that book and of various newspaper and magazine discussions of the Nogi suicide has tempted me to take up the pen on the topic which heads this article, i.e., the despotism of the dead over the living in Japan.

It is, indeed, quite interesting, in entering upon this subject, to note that it takes us into many fields of human thought and activity—into the realms of sociology, political science, economics, law, ethics, and religion. It is, therefore, a socio-politico-economic-legal-ethico-religious topic; it is omnipresent and omnipotent.

The rule of the dead, especially through ancestor-worship as its chief formal manifestation, but even without such or any manifestation, is omnipresent. This word is used in a double sense, because the two single meanings can scarcely be separated in this case, of being always present and everywhere present. Unless the instances in which radical Christian missionaries have compelled the abandonment of this so-called idolatrous practice be excepted, there is hardly a place or time where or when the hand of the dead is not "heavy upon the living." This is true, not only in private, but also in public, affairs; as will appear evident from the few illustrations which follow.

It is true in private affairs, i.e., the affairs, not merely of an individual, but also of a family. In every Japanese house there are two sacred places: the Shinto god-shelf and the Buddhist altar (on a shelf); and before these the members of the household make daily obeisance according to rites prescribed by each cult. It must be kept in mind, that, while New Japan recognizes the rights of an individual under certain circumstances, in Old Japan the individual was swallowed up in the family, the clan, and the nation. Therefore, ancestor-worship was carried on, not by the individual, but by the family, the clan, or community, and the nation.

There are both regular and special times for ancestor-worship. The regular times included sacrifice-days, sacrifice-months, and sacrifice-years, which were not often the same in Shinto and Buddhist ceremonies. According to Shinto, house-worship should be celebrated on the anniversary day of the

death each month, especially the anniversary month, in the following anniversary year: first, fifth, tenth, twentieth, thirtieth, fortieth, fiftieth, and hundredth years, and after that every fifty years. According to Buddhism, such ceremonies would take place every seventh day until the seventh seventh, or forty-ninth, day and in the first, third, seventh, thirteenth, seventeenth, twenty-third, twenty-seventh, thirty-third, thirty-seventh, forty-third, forty-seventh, fiftieth, and hundredth years, and after that every fifty years. Moreover, there are three general ceremonial dates for offering sacrifices to the spirits of ancestors, both at home and at the graves. These are the festivals of the spring and fall equinoxes and the famous Bon festival of the seventh month; and they continue for several days. From this paragraph it will be quite evident that it is no small or easy task to keep track of the calendar of the dead.

But there are also special times for ancestor-worship, of which Dr. Hozumi has cited the following examples:

When a young student goes to Europe or America to pursue his studies, when a soldier sets out on a campaign, when an official is sent abroad on some government mission, or when a merchant undertakes a long journey on business, he invariably visits the tombs of his ancestors in order to take leave of them.

And, to do this, it may be necessary to spend much time and money on a long trip to a distant place. And Dr. Hozumi sums it all up as follows: "In fact, the worship of the spirits of ancestors forms a part of the everyday life of the people."

It is also true that the hand of the dead is heavy upon the living in public affairs. There are, for instance, thirteen great festivals and eight small festivals,<sup>1</sup> with fixed ceremonies of worship of ancestors, in the imperial house. Almost all of these great festivals and two of the small festivals are kept as national holidays; but they must be scrupulously observed as occasions for ancestor-worship by the members of the imperial family and by certain officials. Therefore, Dr. Hozumi infers that "it will be readily seen that the worship of the imperial ancestors is the national worship."

The rule of the dead is practically omnipotent in Japan. The regulations for the observances in honor of the deceased must be rigidly carried out in every little particular. To break one point of that law is a great sin. Moreover, such observances, whether domestic, communal, or national, must take precedence of all else, no matter how important or urgent. Personal convenience, pecuniary expense, value of time, business contingency, professional duty, considerations of health, everything, must be sacrificed to the demands of the ancestral rights and rites. "The happiness of the dead depends on the respectful and loving service of the living; and the happiness of the living depends on the due fulfilment of pious duty to the dead." Vergil's *pious Aeneas* could very easily find a place in the pantheon of national heroes in Japan. Although he lost his wife, he saved his aged father; although he basely deserted Dido, he carried his household Penates with him to re-establish his *familia* in Italy.

<sup>1</sup>See pp. 34-47 of Dr. Hozumi's book.

The political phases of this rule of the dead in Japan are quite interesting, because they set forth the strength in Japan of the old doctrine of "the divine right of the king." Although Charles I of England paid with his life the penalty of insisting too vigorously and practically upon the exemplification of that theory, no Stuart ever even dreamed of the applications to which it could be put in Japan. And, if Charles Stuart had been a Japanese, he might have saved his neck and still have satisfied the anti-Royalists!

The connection between ancestor-worship and government in Japan appears in several words. *Matsurigoto*, meaning literally "worship-affairs," is a common term for "government" or "rule," *Seiji-hajime*, meaning literally "state affairs—Commencement" takes place on January 4 and "consists in the emperor receiving from his ministers the report of the affairs of the Great Shrine [Shinto] at Ise." There is an old expression, quite common, *Saisei-itchi*, which means "worship [and] government-unity"; and an old Chinese expression is true also in Japan, that the great "affairs of state are worship and war." Even the modern constitution of Japan formally recognizes the imperial ancestors and has produced a "tripartite" system, which Dr. Hozumi calls "theocratico-patriarchal-constitutionalism." This is another instance of "the curious blending of the past and present" which "is one of the most striking phenomena of Japan." Dr. Hozumi presents still another illustration, as follows:

To the Western eyes, the sight must appear strange of a Japanese family inviting

their relatives through the medium of the telephone to take part in a ceremony of this nature. Equally incongruous may seem the spectacle of members of a family, some of them attired in European, and others in native, costume, assembled in a room lighted by electricity, making offerings and obeisances before the memorial tablet of their ancestor.

But, with reference to the constitution, Dr. Hozumi is able to state "from personal knowledge" that Ito was very careful in its preparation "to reconcile and bring into harmony the traditional character of the government, based on the cult of the imperial ancestor, with the most advanced principles of modern constitutionalism." When Japan adopts, she adapts.

It is rather interesting to note how the rule of the dead is still recognized in the new Civil Code, in which "the East and West, the past and the present, meet." In the revision of the Civil Code in those modern days, although recognition of individual rights<sup>1</sup> is granted under certain circumstances, it was not possible to break at once with the old customs. Therefore, while occidental or cosmopolitan influences were quite strong in the sections relating to the laws of obligations and movables, national customs influenced the laws of family and succession. For instance, the Japanese family law rests upon the two bases of house and kinship; of which the house "is a legal entity originally founded on ancestor-worship," and degrees in kinship are connected with not merely distance of blood-relationship but also family rank. This double standard has more or less affected the provisions of the new Civil Code

concerning adoption, succession, abdication, divorce, etc.

There is likewise an economic aspect to this rule of the dead in Japan. The despotism of the "family" (which has a broader meaning than in America or England) may be utilized to keep in hereditary labor or business or profession one who is not well fitted to continue therein. On the other hand, this same iron bend of the family may be useful in keeping unworthy individuals from becoming burdens on society. Again, family traditions may be so conservative as to hinder, if not actually prevent, the proper development of an occupation, a business enterprise, an industry, or some other economical institution. But the tyranny of the family may also be invoked to check injurious competition and either to establish or to check monopoly. And even the tendency to nationalize industries by establishing government monopolies seems to be an application of the same idea to the state; for the empire of Japan is really little more than a big family.

It is scarcely necessary to dwell at much length upon the social phases of this rule of the dead, as they have already been suggested by what has been written above. They are most evident in such matters as marriage, divorce, adoption, and the dissolution thereof, and succession. The rule of the dead appears also as the basis of the graded system of relationship. And, as Hearn says, "though ancient social groupings have been officially abolished, regroupings of a corresponding sort have been formed, instinctively, throughout the country districts." And that is where this form of despotism still remains supreme,

<sup>1</sup>The Japanese word for "right(s)," *kenri*, was coined in the year 1868.

where "family and public sentiment are still more potent than law." Moreover, the old patriarchal and hierarchical organization of society has left its mark in "prescribed rules for dress, diet, and manner of life" and the strict conventionalisms of language. Honorifics and humilifics have been multiplied and carefully graded; and this stern etiquette of language and deportment has descended to the present.

But "manners are morals and etiquette is ethics," especially in Japan. The ethical aspects of this ancestral domestic despotism are very significant. Moral standards become quite different. Filial piety naturally occupies a loftier position than in Western ethical systems: it is, for instance, considered a higher virtue than personal chastity, so that a daughter is not wicked but righteous who devotes herself to a life of shame to support her family. Reckless bravery, suicide rather than surrender, suicide like that in the Nogi case—all these are not vices but virtues. Politeness, likewise, may be a higher virtue than truth; so that to be rude is a worse sin than to tell a lie. And "the supreme crime" is to neglect or forget the duties owed to one's ancestors, domestic or national. The ancient morality, which has not yet entirely lost its power, "consisted in the minute observance of rules of conduct regarding the household, the community, and the higher authority." Therefore, the hand of the dead is heavy over the living in Japan even today in the field of ethics.

If we examine this subject from the religious point of view, we see, first, that the rule of the dead was an important element of Shinto (if that cult can be

called a religion). Next, we find that this rule of the dead, with its forms of ancestor-worship, was accepted by Buddhism in Japan. Thus domestic, communal, and national worship of ancestors became a kind of religion to the Japanese and is losing power chiefly or only where the most radical Christian influence prevails. This religion is a kind of "spiritualism," by which, according to Japanese ideas, "the spirits of our ancestors" are the guiding and ruling forces of the lives of the living. The suicide of General and Countess Nogi was not cowardly or immoral, but was a loyal and religious act, which has made them not only heroes but also "gods." There is a good deal of truth in the statement that "the combined forces of the living and the dead (but the living under the direction of the dead) are the rulers of modern Japan and the shapers of its destinies."

One natural inference from the foregoing discussion is that the Japanese are not so inclined as occidentals to distinguish carefully between the "secular" and the "religious." They need to have impressed upon them the profound meaning of Christ's wise instructions to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's."

And in this connection, a query arises concerning the meaning of the word "worship" in connection with ancestors. There is not much doubt that, in the minds of the uneducated masses, their ancestors are really "gods," whom they worship much as Christians worship only God. But it is not so with the educated classes, by whom the word is used in that connection much in the sense in which

Carlyle used it in "hero-worship." Dr. Hozumi says: "If ancestor-worship is, as maintained in this book, the extension of love and respect to distant forefathers, the manifestation of this love and respect in a certain harmless way may be regarded as a realization of the Fifth Commandment to honor the parents."

The points discussed in the preceding paragraphs might have been treated in greater detail; but they seem to be sufficiently established by what has been written. The hand of the dead is still heavy in Japan, because the family is the social unit and is dominated by ancestor-worship, formal or informal. Percival Lowell has said that "the

Empire is one great family; the family is a little empire." But the imperial despotism of the family has been weakened considerably by the increased and increasing power given to the individual. The unwritten law of long-established social customs may hold its own for some time against the written laws of the new codes. But the social customs are gradually changing under the influence of individualistic ideas and will come into harmony with the legal enactments. The individual will honor his father and mother and ancestors, and will also himself receive due honor. The dead will be found to be less useful than the living in Japan.

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## THE MYSTICISM OF JESUS AND OF PAUL

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*Professor Buckham's discussion is timely. We are in danger of coming to regard the New Testament as a mere field of criticism. How vast a mistake that would be! Let us come back more earnestly to a vitally religious point of view and see that whatever we may learn about Jesus and Paul, they and their own experiences of God are immeasurably precious.*

### I

It is a question of very pressing and vital moment how far Christianity is a mystical religion. To answer it we must first go back to its founder and his earliest interpreters. Unless the spirit and principles of mysticism are found in Jesus we cannot rightly call Christianity a mystical religion. If mysticism is an alien strain inducted into the religion of

Jesus it cannot command the unreserved support of his disciples.

When we approach Jesus with the measuring wand of mysticism, we are not left long in doubt as to the positive character of the result. Evidences of the presence of the mystical in Jesus are undeniable, even in the Synoptic Gospels. One can hardly think of him at all without feeling his intimate mystic sense